



Governor's Renewable Energy Policy Conference
Siting and Permitting Large-Scale Projects in the California Desert and Beyond
March 24, 2010 - UC Riverside, Highlander Union Building (HUB)

A Policy Primer for the Afternoon Breakout Sessions

To assist in framing the conversations that will take place during the 10:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. breakout sessions, each panel's moderator has written a brief overview of the panel topic. These policy papers and the corresponding three questions will guide breakout discussions between panelists and session attendees as well as the report back to the larger conference audience.

Breakout Session 1 - Landscape of the desert: How to balance conflicting environmental goals?

Moderator: Kevin Sweeney, Resources Legacy Fund. Panelists: Ron Goldman, Riverside County Planning Director; Kim Delfino, California Program Director, Defenders of Wildlife; Shannon Eddy, Executive Director, Large Solar Association; Laura Crane, Nature Conservancy; Michael Allen, Professor & Chair, Plant Pathology & Microbiology, UC Riverside

From a car window along Highway 15, the California desert may look like empty space. To the careful observer – or anyone inclined and able to walk parts of the region – there is so much more. These are diverse landscapes, rich in biodiversity.

In the same way that a desert wash can look utterly different during winter flooding and the wildflower season that follows, the desert looks different to many of us. What we see at first glance varies greatly, and it depends on the perspective we bring to the discussion.

- The desert is a unique landscape, a place of beauty, solace and escape. A fragile ecosystem already weakened by development, it is home to multiple endangered species. Protection of these lands and the biodiversity they support is essential.
- It contains some of the most valuable solar resources on earth. Radiation levels in some places are extraordinary, and their proximity to a large population center means these lands could be used to reduce our use of fossil fuels – and help stave off the worst effects of global warming.
- It is a dynamic resource, changing at an unprecedented pace. Even the most optimistic projections for climate change suggest we will still see significant changes in desert temperatures and precipitation patterns. The region's biodiversity will change.

Perspectives differ, but each offers a different angle on environmental protection. The landscape conservationist starts with an understanding of fragmented landscapes in dire need of protection. The renewable energy advocate starts with an understanding that quickly reducing our use of fossil fuels is a vital step toward long-term protection of desert and other habitats. These starting points are both valid.

Degrees of urgency add a layer of complexity. The economic recession makes financing difficult for renewable energy projects, and access to federal stimulus funding ends this year. Waiting to respond in earnest to the climate crisis will make future responses even more difficult: Lengthy delays may not serve desert ecosystems.

The *Landscape of the Desert* Panel will discuss the following three questions:

- **What are the necessary steps to ensure a balanced process and balanced results?**
- **Should we be looking for a healthy balance in the desert, as we understand it to exist today? Or should we be looking for a healthy balance in the desert as it might exist 30 or 50 years from now?**
- **What are some of the tradeoffs we may need to accept? How do we prioritize these tradeoffs?**